

DATE: December 10, 2012

TO Natural Resources Board

FROM: Cathy Stepp, Secretary

SUBJECT: 2012 Deer Season Report

Wisconsin continues to be a world deer hunting destination, with over 633,000 hunters from every state in the country and several foreign countries having purchased licenses to participate in the traditions of the state's 161st nine-day gun deer season this year. The traditions of the nine-day hunt include camaraderie, deer camp stories, a commitment to safety and respect for fellow hunters and the state's natural resources. Continuing and sharing these traditions is what keeps the state's hunting heritage strong, and is a goal of the department.

This year the department saw the traditions being passed along to nearly 29,000 new hunters who bought First Time and Returning Hunter licenses for the nine-day. New female hunters represented 33 percent of this total, and another 33 percent of first time buyers were youth, ages 17 and under. Additionally, 80 First Time Buyer licenses were sold to hunters 80 and older, illustrating how deep Wisconsin's hunting heritage runs. Anecdotal feedback from registration station opening weekend indicated that many of the first time hunters had success this year, with a number harvesting or being mentored by hunters who harvested bucks.

Buck harvest did rise this year, amongst all hunters. The preliminary nine-day tally showed hunters harvested 114,822 bucks, for a 12 percent increase over 2011. In total, over 243,000 deer were registered, according to preliminary tallies, a 7.7 percent increase over 2011. Hunters had a higher rate of success than last year and in some areas hunters saw more deer than in previous years. However there are areas in the state where deer observations were low. This feedback, along with final harvest numbers, are important as we continue to work with hunters to best manage deer populations in the state. Final harvest tallies will likely rise when all tags are officially counted.

Whether hunters harvested a deer or not, many enjoyed sharing their tales, celebrating others' successful hunts, and connecting with the landscape once again. This year, DNR provided many communication forums for sharing these tales, experiences and knowledge. Deer season communications focused heavily on personalizing the DNR and connecting with hunters – our partners in conservation. It also focused on connecting a broader network of hunters and deer season enthusiasts with one another. Through the coordinated use of multiple social media tools, the sharing of knowledge and deer tales increased exponentially, growing from an exchange between hunting groups to an exchange between thousands.

One of the most important messages continuously shared with department's large network of hunters is the need to hunt safely. Seven shooting related incidents were reported in 2012, below the 10-year average. One incident was fatal. DNR sends sincere condolences to the family and friends of the fatally injured hunter.

Wisconsin continues its commitment to hunter safety. More than 25,000 students complete the hunter's safety program every year, thanks to the work of more than 3,800 volunteer hunter education instructors,

a safety conscious hunting community and DNR staff dedicated to continually enhancing hunter safety. The state marked its one-millionth graduate in 2012. Before the hunter education course started, hunter fatalities during the season commonly ran into the double digits.

Finally, DNR connected with thousands of hunters during the season through the use of the Customer Service Call Center. The call center broke a record the Friday before opening day with 4,235 contacts from the public. This illustrates our increased customer service and ability to process questions immediately.

This year Wisconsin had more than 600,000 people connecting with the land between Nov. 17 and Nov. 25, renewing their commitment to sustaining our natural resources for generations to come. We also had a higher rate of hunter success this year, when talking about how many deer were registered. However “success” of the hunt needs to take into account many pieces, including the value of time spent with friends and family having fun and sharing traditions of the season. I am particularly excited by the numbers of new hunters, especially the number of women, experiencing the nine-day deer hunt for the first time. Engaging a new generation of hunters through stories, mentoring and getting them in the field is what keeps our hunting heritage strong. Of course no hunt is 100 percent successful unless all hunters return home unharmed. But Wisconsin remains committed to hunter safety. Statistically, overall hunter safety continues to increase and will remain a priority for all hunting seasons. The DNR thanks hunters and their families for their involvement, for their respect of each other and the resource, and for continuing to be our partners in conservation.

# DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

## 2012 DEER SEASON REPORT

### Communications

With two goals in mind, providing quality service and increasing dialogue with hunters, Deer Season 2012 communications included coordinated tools to provide information and resources that hunters request, including resources for identifying public hunting land, regulation clarifications, season forecast information, and how to get involved in hunting for the first time. Along with providing this information, tools were developed to enable the DNR to also converse with the public about important topics and share in the excitement of the season. These communication tools increased our ability to reach our audience and for them to reach us, laying the foundations for a continuing conversation with hunters about deer management and keeping our hunting heritage strong in Wisconsin.

Throughout the season and following, DNR has received positive feedback from the public commenting on the increased outreach, the new approach creating excitement about the season, and an improved feel to the DNR, being “less sterile and rigid.” This alone is a success. Added to it is the fact that we increased the size of our directly reachable audience by thousands. This network will continue to grow and benefit DNR’s ability to communicate with target audiences beyond deer season.

This was achieved through changing earned media strategies to provide more direct access to department staff and user friendly options for tracking license numbers and other statistics online; creating new applications for determining hunting hours and finding Managed Forest Land and other public hunting areas; and further developing and coordinating DNR’s use of social media, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and a new wildlife blog.

The communication strategy kicked off Nov. 1 with airings of Deer Hunt 2012, a DNR partnership production with Dan Small showcased on Wisconsin Public Television and the Fox Sports Network. A major communications blitz was implemented starting Nov. 12 which ran through the end of the season. The blitz included the coordinated use of earned media, social media, and web tools to engage, involve and inform hunters and others with a vested interest in the season. Tools and their audience impact, in terms of viewership and growth, are summarized below. Given the positive feedback and the statistical impacts, DNR anticipates repeating and building on these efforts next year as well as incorporating similar tools and tactics into other department communication plans.

#### **Tools:**

**YouTube** – Developed six new videos for the season. Three videos featured personal messages from the Governor and/or DNR Secretary to hunters. One video highlighted the Voluntary Public Access Program, another the Customer Service Call Line, and the final video captured tales of the hunt direct from hunters at registration stations. Nearly 14,000 people viewed these videos, pushing our YouTube channel viewership over 100,000 (currently near 122,000). The three videos featuring the Governor and/or Secretary received 59 percent of the views. The channel experienced 27,463 views of deer-hunting-related videos during the season.

**GovDelivery** – Intensified the use of these web-based distribution lists during the deer communication blitz. Multiple coordinated messages were sent to over 104,000 subscriber email inboxes, a circulation comparable to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and Wisconsin State Journal. With a 20 percent rate of recipients opening the messages, we reached nearly 20,800 people directly with our message multiple times in one week.

**“Ask the Experts” chat series** – Hosted a series of four live online chats leading up to opening day. Each chat focused on a theme that was reinforced by news releases, Facebook updates, Tweets and other identically themed communication tools on the same day. The themes were: women in hunting, season forecast, access, and hunting safely. Over 780 people participated directly in the live chats. Another 2,400 read the transcripts of the chats posted online.

**Wildlife blog** – Launched the first wildlife blog, written by DNR wildlife biologist, Jeff Pritzl. The theme was “Hunting for the Health of it,” and explored a specific aspect of hunting each day that leads to wellness including the physical, intellection, and environmental aspect of hunting. The blog had over 200 hits within two hours of its first post, and 2,700 people read it over the seven days series.

**Tweet-along** – Live fed tweets about interesting events and insights into the deer hunt from the view of a warden ride-along. The warden tweet-along gained DNR’s Twitter account 450 new followers during the season and increased traffic from 69 mentions to 171. This growth represents 16 percent of DNR followers in just 1 percent of the time DNR has been tweeting.

**Facebook** – Integrated as a key tool to promoting other communication pieces and engaging followers in conversation about the deer season. Facebook was a key location for sharing stories and information between DNR and its “friends,” but also for connecting hunters and deer season enthusiasts with one another. We promoted the engagement of followers by hosting the department’s first-ever Facebook photo contest, collecting photos that represent the traditions of the nine-day season. A winner was chosen by peers who voted for their favorite photo and was awarded a three year subscription to Wisconsin Natural Resources Magazine. In two weeks, DNR gained 963 new “likes,” representing 10 percent of total followers.

**Web** – In addition to being the main page for deer season and regulation information, the deer hunt web page anchored all social media tools. DNR’s “deer” page was reconfigured to be the social media gateway for deer season and to house a regularly-updated table of license sales and quick facts for media and others interested in these numbers during the week leading up to opening day and again at the end of the season. Additionally, 14 days of web splashes, or pop-up windows featuring interesting and useful information relative to the season, were developed. Accompanying these splashes were 14 web features, a newsletter style web page featuring comprehensive information on topics ranging from hunter recruitment and First Time Buyer licenses, to public access, hunter safety, and the history of hunting in Wisconsin. Some of the features had over 3,000 views apiece and the “deer” web page (the main deer hunting page) had 97,000 views in the month of November.

## Hunting Licenses

A record number of hunters (105,948) waited until the day before the season opener to purchase their license in 2012. This is the highest number of licenses issued through the licensing system in one day, peaking at 268 licenses sold per minute just before dinner time. Over 60% of this year's deer licenses were sold in the month of November.

### License Sales

- ✓ **633,460** total Deer Gun Hunters, up 2% from last year
- ✓ Resident deer licenses (**585,736**) are up 2%
- ✓ Nonresident deer licenses (**34,256**) up 3%
- ✓ 10/11 year old Mentored Gun Deer licenses (**13,468**) are up 10%
- ✓ The majority of gun deer licenses (**93%**) **were issued at license agents**, and **DNR issued 3%**.
- ✓ **Internet sales** was the **single highest sales** location issuing 4% of all deer licenses in 2012. Nearly 16% of nonresident licenses are purchased over the internet.
- ✓ Dane, Brown, Washington, Marathon, Outagamie, and Waukesha represented the counties with the highest gun deer sales.

### Gun Hunters

- ✓ **Female participation continues to increase, nearing 10% of our total gun deer hunters**, compared to just over 9% from 2011;
- ✓ Females represent 23% of 10 year olds, and remain above 10% through the age of 31
- ✓ **81,250 (or 13%) were youth** (under age of 18)
- ✓ **62,097 (or 10%) were senior citizens** (65 years of age and older)
- ✓ Hunters from every state in the country and several foreign countries purchased a gun deer license. The most out-of state hunters came from Minnesota, Illinois, Michigan, Florida, Iowa, Texas and California.

### First Time Gun Deer License Hunters – **NEW LICENSE IN 2012!**

- ✓ **28,925** First Time Buyer Licenses
  - **15,543** resident gun deer
  - **9,660** resident junior gun deer
  - **3,722** nonresident gun deer
- ✓ **Females represented 33% of resident First Time Gun Deer licenses and 30% of resident First Time Junior Gun Deer licenses**
- ✓ 3,222 First Time Gun Deer licenses were sold during the season
- ✓ Of the adult First Time Gun Deer License purchasers:
  - 5,333 or 18% between the age of 20-29
  - 4,189 , or 14% between the age of 30-39
  - 4,066 , or 14% between the age of 40-49

- 2,948, or 10% between the age of 50-59
  - 1,007, or 3% senior citizens (65 and above)
- ✓ 80 first time licenses were sold to hunters 80 and older

### **10 & 11 Year Old Hunters**

- ✓ Over **13,450** 10 & 11 year old youth participated in this year's Mentored Hunting Program:
- 10 percent increase - 13,468 licenses purchased in 2012 compared to 12,226 in 2011 and 11,331 in 2010
  - 96 percent (12915) were residents; 553 nonresidents
  - 23 percent of 10 year olds, and 24% of 11 year olds were female

## Law Enforcement Season Overview

We thank all of the hunters who aid our efforts to protect our resources from poachers and people who endanger public safety. Wardens recognize people who violate the law may only represent a very small percentage of those in the field, but these few can adversely impact public safety, our wildlife, and the image of all hunters. The assistance provided by the public in helping us apprehend violators who endanger public safety or steal opportunity from law abiding hunters is greatly appreciated. The public is the key to our success in protecting the people and natural resources in Wisconsin on behalf of future generations.

The focus of the conservation wardens' work is enforcement, education and public safety. During the gun deer season, wardens primarily respond to citizen complaints, check for license compliance, and investigate hunting accidents. But the wardens also spend a great deal of time simply answering questions about the laws, tagging deer for hunters, and assisting other agencies. Over the 9 day gun deer season, they sometimes find themselves mediating disputes over deer and deer hunting spots, and apprehending individuals with warrants and operating vehicles while intoxicated all while maintaining their regular response to environmental damage and non deer-hunting related complaints.

I'd like to share a brief synopsis and general comments about the gun deer season and information contained within the Bureau of Law Enforcement's Gun Deer Season Report. More details can be found in the remainder of the report.

- The Mentored Hunting Law has caught on with the number of licenses sold to 10 and 11 year olds increasing by 10 percent this year. Wardens reported that mentored hunters, youth, and families in the field were some of the most satisfied hunters with their overall experience.
- Wardens related many examples of hunter actions that reflect well on hunters. They shared positive hunting experiences and photos on social media, took advantage of electronic technology to report detailed information about violations observed, and welcomed youth and first time hunters to participate.
- The rate of hunting related shooting injuries/fatalities for the 2012 gun deer season was 1.1 incidents per 100,000 hunters. There were seven incidents total, of which one was a fatality.
- There were an increased number of Hotline calls during the season (732). In addition to complaints received via the Hotline, wardens received and responded to **3,637 calls for service** directly from the public during the gun deer season.
- There were 994 citations/arrests reported, down slightly from 1,009 citations/arrests in 2011. Wardens documented 1,627 verbal warnings for violations encountered.
- Wardens were involved in 14 search and rescue situations during the gun deer season.
- As time permitted, and as a customer service, wardens registered 613 deer in the field. Daily deer registrations in the field generally reflect hunting pressure on a daily basis.

## **General Observations on the gun deer season**

- Most hunters reported seeing more deer. Hunters in the CWD Zones expressed satisfaction that they were able to harvest one buck without first harvesting an antlerless deer. Wardens did not report widespread use of crossbows. Hunters are increasingly making use of computers at home and smart phones in the field to access information on lands open to hunting, hunting hours and maps.
- Wardens, particularly those in northern Wisconsin where there were units with no antlerless quota (and therefore no \$12 bonus antlerless tags available) questioned the need to issue Herd Control tags. These tags are issued with each license sold, and hunters had questions about how and where the tags could be used.
- Law-abiding hunters and citizens continue to demonstrate a low tolerance for violations as evidenced by the number of Hotline calls received. Complaints are often accompanied by GPS coordinates and cell phone photos of vehicles, bait, and hunters suspected of committing violations. Wardens appreciate the extra details!
- In the year since the law allowing uncased firearms in a vehicle became effective, wardens reported that they observed a significant increase in the number of individuals choosing to transport their firearms uncased. Citations for having a loaded firearm in a vehicle increased compared to the previous year.
- Weather conditions were mild throughout the state, from highs of 50 degrees and lows below freezing. Fog was present in many areas on opening morning. Some parts of the state received a light snowfall, nothing significant enough to impact travel by vehicle or foot. Corn crop harvest was again almost 100% complete, which has an effect on huntable acreage, visibility of hunters (a safety concern with standing corn), and reduces the number of places deer can hide.
- While conflict between hunters was present, wardens report relatively few problems. These conflicts tend to fall into three main areas: conflict between neighboring landowners, conflict between hunters on public lands vying for the same prime areas, and conflict occurring between hunters at the property lines between public and private land. While the Voluntary Access Program has been extremely popular, it has caused the occasional parking dilemma due to lack of designated parking space, and occasional accidental trespass since property boundaries are not as well marked as public hunting lands.

In the following pages, we provide more detailed information on arrests and calls for service, data on license sales, a look at some of the initiatives that have been undertaken to recruit and retain hunters, and specific reports of incidents that give you a snapshot of the activities of Bureau of Law Enforcement staff members. During this 9 day season when more than a half million people participate in their favorite fall pastime, we strive to give everyone the safest and most enjoyable experience possible.



## **USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA, E-MAIL and THE HUNTING HOUR APP**

As part of the coordinated DNR deer season communication efforts, the Bureau of Law Enforcement this year used two tools developed by the bureau to inform and educate the public about the wardens' work and the season.

### **1. Warden Wire: a free e-mail news service about conservation wardens, launched in fall 2011**

<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/wardenwire/> -

- **Warden Wire** had **143,878 total page views** from October 27 – November 26, 2012 according to a Google Analytics report covering the pre-hunt information distributions through the gun-deer season close.
  - Links to **Warden Wire** (WW) stories were shared by WW subscribers, promoted on the DNR Twitter feed, DNR Facebook page and posted online by traditional media outlets where reader forums are used, thereby making *Warden Wire* also part of the social media world.
  - 10,000 to 12,000 *Warden Wire* page views each on November 15 and November 21.
  - About 200 subscribers joined *Warden Wire* during the month of November.
  - Top *Warden Wire* product of gun-deer season: 9 sets of FAQs: Special Edition–Gun-Deer Hunt. Total Page Views: 60,301

### **2. DNR Hunting Hours App: 1,669 sold as of November 26.**

- Bureau of Law Enforcement designed and sold the DNR's first-ever WI Hunter Hour app for Android smart phones. The Hunting Hours App sells for 99 cents and displays the hunting hours for the hunter's current location, or can search for other locations. It also can show hunting hours for future dates and various game animals.

## **HUNTER RECRUITMENT and RETENTION**

Several new initiatives focusing on hunter recruitment and retention were launched this year. The DNR stepped up recruitment and retention of new hunters, and partnerships with current hunters through the Hunter Challenge website, the Sporting Heritage Act signed into law in April 2012, and the development of a technical college course to train new hunters. Web-based technology to improve access to information unearthed a potential source of new hunters.

The Hunter Challenge website was launched in late summer and averaged about 80 customer views a day. The objective of the Wisconsin Hunter Challenge is to slow the decline in hunter numbers. The challenge is to get individuals involved. We'll measure the number of hunters in three key age groups this year compared to the last two. The goal is to get hunters involved on the local community level and display results by age group in each county. The pages can be found by searching keyword "challenge" on the DNR website.

**Number of 10-11 year old Mentored Hunting gun deer licenses sold 2009-2012**

| <b>Year</b>   | <b>2012</b>   | <b>2011</b>   | <b>2010</b>   | <b>2009</b>  |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| <b>Number of mentored gun deer licenses sold to 10-11 year olds</b> | <b>13,468</b> | <b>12,226</b> | <b>11,331</b> | <b>9,907</b> |

*See the addendum for some positive mentored and youth hunting stories.*

**HUNTER EDUCATION ADULT INTERNET PROGRAM**

As a result of the Sporting Heritage Act, the DNR was able to offer an Adult Internet Hunter Education course where individuals completed an online course, scheduled a time to take the test at a DNR office, and completed the written and practical tests in about an hour of their time. Nearly 800 adults took advantage of this option since it was first offered in July. At most locations, all available spots for the testing were filled and had waiting lists. In response to the demand, the Hunter Education program plans to offer additional testing opportunities associated with the online course in 2013. The week prior to the gun deer season, many of the test takers at the Fitchburg DNR office walked across the hall to the service counter and purchased their first deer license as soon as they received their certificate. This table is a list of the counties that held the written and practical exam, number of test dates, and total number of students. There was a 98% pass rate among the test takers.

| <b>County</b> | <b># of test dates</b> | <b># of students</b> |
|---------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Brown         | 6                      | 167                  |
| Dane          | 6                      | 229                  |
| Eau Claire    | 5                      | 84                   |
| Marathon      | 1                      | 44                   |
| Milwaukee     | 4                      | 144                  |
| Washburn      | 3                      | 39                   |
| Winnebago     | 1                      | 67                   |

**FIRST TIME and RETURNING LICENSE BUYER GUN DEER HUNTERS**

The Sporting Heritage Act included provisions for a deer license cost to first time resident buyers of just \$5.00, and non-resident buyers of \$79.75 (half price.) Returning hunters, defined as those who have not participated in at least 10 years, were also able to purchase these specially priced licenses. These license opportunities were promoted through outreach on the WDNR website, Hunters Network of Wisconsin website, Facebook page and a statewide radio campaign in late October and early November.

We've followed hunter numbers by age for many years and watched what happens as the people age forward. In nearly all age groups, hunters are "lost" every year as they get older. This year as hunters aged, there was growth (more hunters) in every single age between 20 and 50. First Time Buyers accounted for the sale 28,925 licenses this year, more than 19,000 of those buyers were adults. They may not all be "hunters" yet, but they tried it out and some of them are bound to keep it up or return again. We will follow this group through their customer numbers to assess and evaluate the long term effectiveness of these various trials and new options.

The bottom line is, we believe that we have found a source of new hunters (adults) and we will continue to find ways to serve their needs and introduce new families to hunting. The overall number of licenses sold this year increased about 2% over last year.

Equally as important has been the steady growth in the number of females participating in deer hunting. The number has had steady growth of about 2-3% per year over the past five years. In 2012, the number of females participating in deer hunting jumped by more than 10%. This good news could be due to the discount for first time buyers and/or the convenient new adult hunter safety courses offered.

The number of 10 and 11 year-olds hunting with the mentored only privilege continued to rise. Over 13,000 kids under the age of 12 hunted this year with a mentor, 10% growth over 2011. We are partnering with the Hunters Network of Wisconsin to provide a reward drawing for mentors nominated by their apprentice hunters.

Where can I hunt? That is a frequently heard question as hunters report that urban sprawl is affecting hunting opportunities in many parts of Wisconsin. They comment that the loss of access to private lands, due to development, affects the overall quality of deer hunting opportunities. The loss of available private lands displaces hunters and adds additional pressure to the public areas. The new web mapping application for Managed Forest and Forest Crop Lands greatly enhance hunter access to these properties this year and Law Enforcement personnel contacted many hunters who were excited by the second year of the Voluntary Public Access Program (VPA). Many deer hunters took advantage of the VPA program and gun deer hunted on those properties. They stated they received information about the properties through the DNR website.

There appears to be interest in future development of web-based tools to easily access property maps and information similar to the WDNR Hunting Hours app that was rolled out in early November 2012. The \$1 app will calculate the hunting hours based on the species and the hunter's location. About 1,700 copies of the app have been sold since to date. (One hunter who used the app suggested an improvement - a built-in feature that would cause the phone to buzz to signal the beginning and end of hunting hours so you wouldn't even have to take the phone out of your pocket!)

### **THE MAKING OF A NEW HUNTER - A HUNTER RECRUITMENT SUCCESS STORY**

We recognize that not everyone grows up with adult mentors to introduce them to hunting from an early age. The DNR is offering a number of opportunities for those interested in learning to hunt, and one Madison man took full advantage of DNR sponsored Learn to Hunt events, classes and reduced price licenses to test the waters, and find out if hunting was really for him. David LeZaks, his wife, and friend are part of an emerging market of new hunters. They are self-described "locavores" and "foodies" meaning they choose their food based on where it comes from and how it was raised. They and other locavores participated in the first ever "Hunting for Sustainability" course offered by DNR through Madison Area Technical College in September 2012. The 8-hour course focused on teaching participants

how to hunt, field dress and butcher whitetail deer as a source of sustainable local protein. David took part in a Learn to Hunt turkey event last spring, and after the Hunting for Sustainability course, he bought or acquired firearms, participated in a Learn to Deer Hunt event and purchased a \$5.00 hunting license. He tells the story of his first deer hunting outing:

“On Sunday, around 7:45 am, I harvested my first deer. I was out on MFL land near Richland Center ... sitting atop a ridge looking down toward a network of deer trails, patiently waiting. A group of 6-8 does started to walk through. I took aim and shot (with a bit of a shaky hand) and missed, but took aim at another deer who had stopped to figure out what that loud noise was, and was able to get a shot off. She collapsed immediately. As I walked from where I took my shot to where she fell, two bald eagles circled above and landed in the tree above where I was sitting.

The field dressing and moving the deer from where she fell to the car were not without their challenges, but many lessons were learned for the next time. We did the registration and CWD testing in Spring Green, then started the butchering process that evening. We were able to get ~45 lbs. of meat, most which we processed last night into summer sausage, snack sticks and Italian sausage (all with 20% added fat from whey-fed, acorn-finished pork from Uplands Dairy.) Some ground venison, backstrap and tenderloin are in the freezer. I have *never had a regular supply of red meat* in my house, so I look forward to experimenting with new dishes and preparations. Thank you all for your time, advice, stories, warnings, safety tips and other tidbits...”

Each time we have offered hunting for sustainability events, the demand outstrips the number of spots available. Through the locavore/foodie connections we have developed, and the adult hunter safety one-hour test out, we believe there are substantial gains to be made in recruiting and forming another community of hunters.

David added, “I’ll be going out again this weekend for the antlerless hunt. I believe one could say that I am hooked.”

## **HUNTING RELATED SHOOTING INCIDENTS**

Wardens conduct thorough investigations to learn what happened in hunting related shooting incidents in order to prevent such incidents in the future. Our lengthy historical data and inquiries into the circumstances of each incident enables us to make effective modifications to hunter education curriculum, target media outreach efforts and train volunteers and Department staff. You can see from the statistics represented in these graphs, that the trend toward involvement in injuries resulting from the discharge of a firearm during the gun deer season is downward.

### **Summary of incidents during gun deer season:**

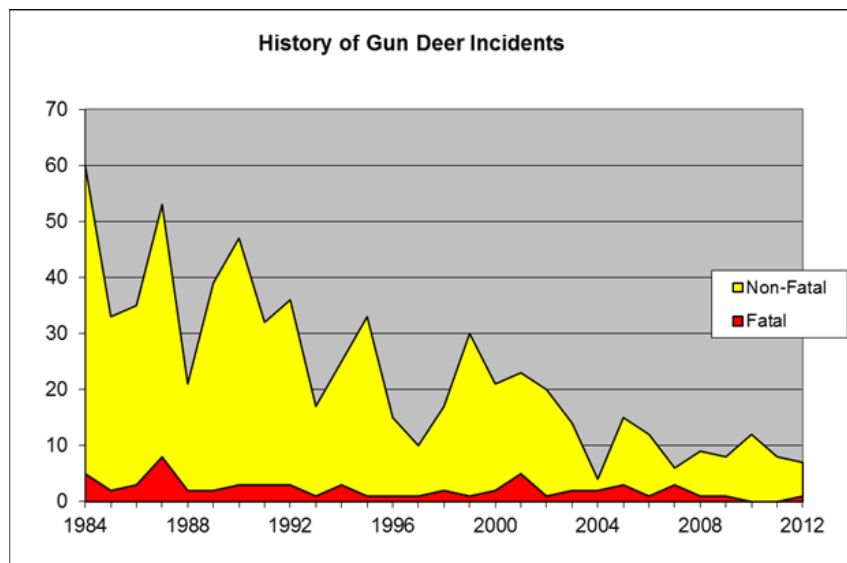
- 2 of the 7 incidents involved a self-inflicted injury (29%), the other 5 incidents involved two individuals, shooter and victim (71%)
- Of the two party incidents, 4 of the 5 involved members of same hunting group (80%.)
- 3 of the incidents occurred during deer drives (43%)

- Type of firearms involved: 6 – Rifle, 1 - Shotgun
- The average age of the shooters involved is 33 years old, 2 of the 7 incidents involved shooters under age 18.

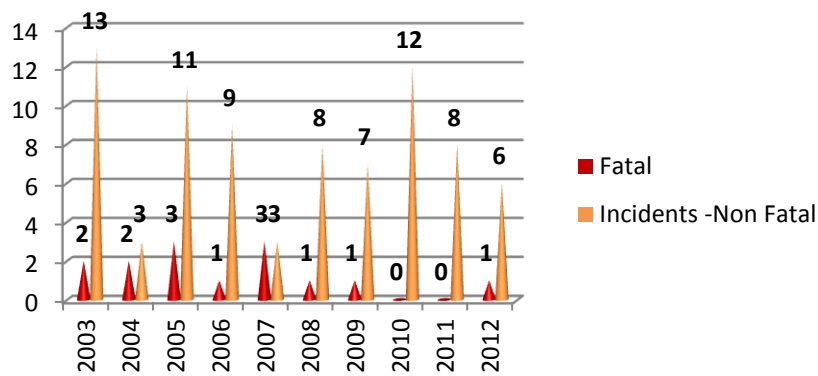
Every year, media outlets have reported on hunter deaths or injuries throughout the season. These reports are often related to death by natural causes or injuries from treestand falls. The WDNR does not track or include these events in statistical reports.

Treestand safety continues to be part of the Wisconsin Hunter Education program with emphasis on the use of safety harnesses, 3 points of contact, use of a haul line to bring unloaded firearms up and down and safety inspections of stands. In addition to the Hunter Education program we have a website page specific to treestand safety and include treestand safety in our media releases.

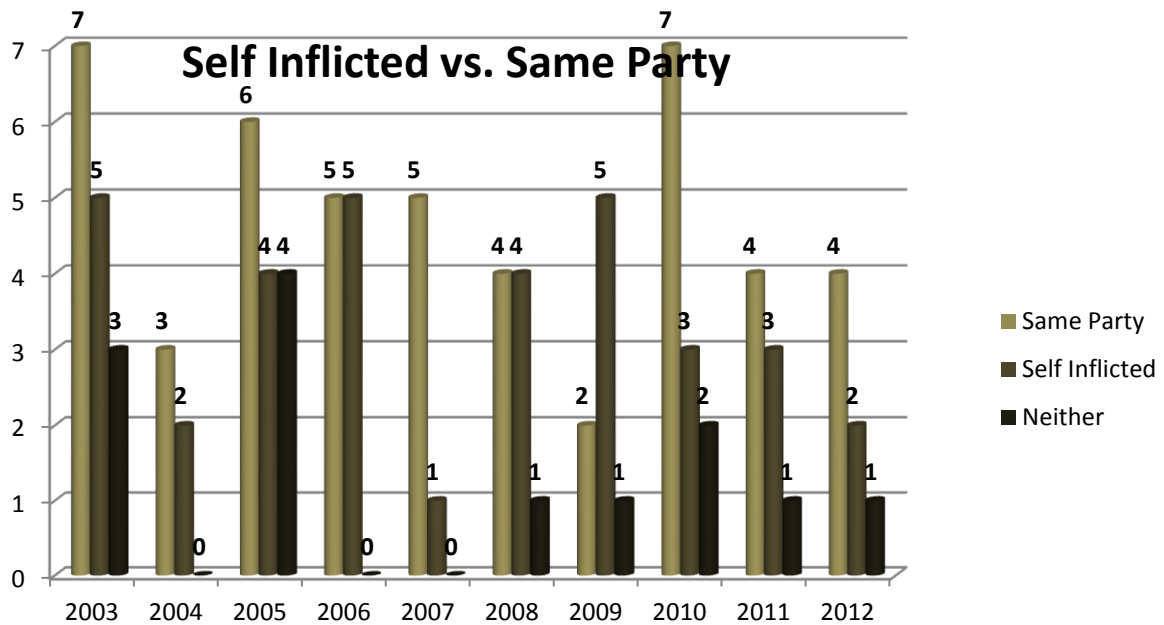
*A complete synopsis can be found in the addendum.*

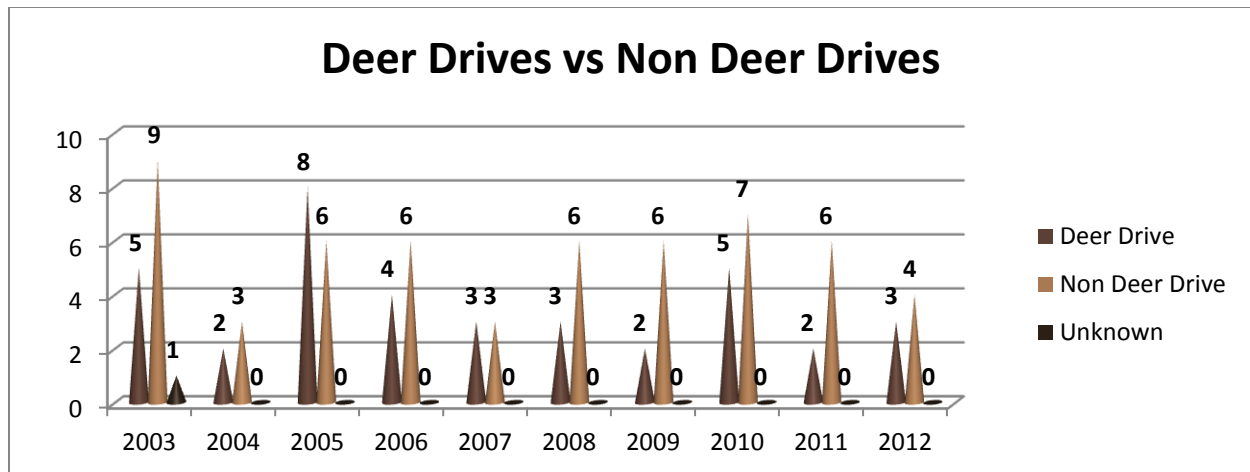


## 9 Day Gun Deer Seasons Only - 10 year Stats



## Self Inflicted vs. Same Party





## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

One of the goals of the warden service is to create a safe and enjoyable outdoor recreational environment for everyone. To this end, wardens have placed emphasis on removing known criminal offenders, intoxicated individuals and subjects using illegal drugs from the outdoor recreational environment in the interest of public safety.

No current law prohibits a person with a felony conviction from purchasing a gun deer hunting license in Wisconsin. However, it is illegal for felons to possess firearms, therefore hunting with a firearm or participation in group deer hunting is illegal. During the 2012 gun deer season, wardens arrested 16 felons in possession of firearms in the field.

A number of other individuals were contacted for violations that can greatly affect public safety. They included 4 subjects who were armed while intoxicated, 9 subjects in possession of drugs or drug paraphernalia, 6 subjects possessing open intoxicants in a vehicle, 2 subjects operating vehicles while intoxicated, and wardens arrested 10 individuals with outstanding warrants. In another instance, wardens intervened in a domestic disturbance with threats of bodily harm; when the armed subject fled into the woods, the wardens, who knew the subject from previous DNR contacts, called his cell phone and convinced him to peacefully turn himself in to the sheriff's deputies.

### **Felons in Possession of a Firearm 2007-2012**

| Year              | 2012 | 2011 | 2010 | 2009 | 2008 | 2007 |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Number of arrests | 16   | 21   | 37   | 29   | 9    | 16   |

## **HUNTER/USER CONFLICTS**

Some conflict is inevitable when more than 600,000 hunters and many other outdoor users hit the woods at the same time. Analyzing the sources of conflict can be instructive in terms of developing strategies to reduce conflicts and create a safe and enjoyable outdoor recreational environment for everyone.

While conflict between hunters was present, wardens reported fewer conflicts between hunters and fewer hunter harassment complaints this year, as compared to prior years. These conflicts tend to fall into three main areas: conflict between neighboring landowners, conflict between hunters on public lands, and conflict occurring between hunters at the property lines between public and private properties.

There were 5 citations issued for interference with lawful hunting, and 10 warnings issued.

Warm weather brings out hikers, bicyclists and dog walkers. Wardens voiced concern for the conflicts arising on state lands between hunters and non-hunters who may not be aware of season dates, and are inadvertently disturbing hunters. Safety is an issue as well since non-hunters are not always wearing the most visible color clothing, a feature that has been proven to lessen the likelihood of an accidental shooting since blaze orange became a requirement in 1980.

### **SEARCH AND RESCUE EFFORTS**

Being ready to respond to emergencies to enhance public safety is a major goal of the warden service. The conservation warden's knowledge of their administrative area, coupled with equipment furnished by the Department enhances efficiency and effectiveness during search and rescue efforts. The use of Global Positioning Units (GPS), computer mapping software, radios, cellular phones, Mobile Data Computers, boats and ATV's were all deployed this deer season in 14 search, rescue, recovery and emergency response efforts. The Department aircraft equipped with forward looking infra-red (FLIR) capabilities was put on standby in a couple of searches. The variety of calls are documented in the addendum, and include requests from other law enforcement agencies to locate missing persons (hunters and non-hunters) in wooded areas, on islands and in urban settings. In several cases, wardens assisted emergency medical personnel with transportation to victims of heart attacks, injuries and tree stand falls, and they responded to vehicular and airplane crashes.

*Details of search and rescue efforts are in the addendum.*

### **BUILDINGS and OTHER INCIDENTAL SHOOTINGS**

Wardens reported that dwellings, garages, commercial buildings, vehicles on the roadway, and an occupied combine were among those items with damage from projectiles during the 9 day season. A cow was found dead and a dog was injured by a hunter as well. These property damage complaints are usually reported to local law enforcement agencies and wardens are often called to assist in the investigations based on their training and expertise. The numbers may not reflect all incidents, and it should not be assumed that all incidents are caused by participants in the gun deer season. If the responsible shooter was located, and in a number of cases they were, they would be liable for repairs, the value of the animal or for the cost of veterinary care. Additionally, arrests were made for shooting across a roadway and reckless use of a firearm when appropriate.

#### **Reported Buildings or Other Incidental Shootings 2007-2012**

| <b>Year</b>           | <b>2012</b> | <b>2011</b> | <b>2010</b> | <b>2009</b> | <b>2008</b> | <b>2007</b> |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b># of incidents</b> | <b>27</b>   | <b>13</b>   | <b>13</b>   | <b>10</b>   | <b>25</b>   | <b>19</b>   |

*See details of incidents in addendum on Public Safety Issues.*



## **ARRESTS**

For the purposes of this report, “arrests” is used to indicate **all** violations for which persons are cited. It includes forfeiture violations in which a citation is issued, cases where a person was taken into custody when warranted, and those cases in which the subject will later be issued a criminal summons by the District Attorney.

### **Summary of arrests and seizures 2007 - 2012**

| <b>Summary by Year</b>         | <b>2012</b> | <b>2011</b>  | <b>2010</b>  | <b>2009</b>  | <b>2008</b>  | <b>2007</b>  |
|--------------------------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>Total number of Arrests</b> | <b>994</b>  | <b>1,009</b> | <b>1,284</b> | <b>1,404</b> | <b>1,400</b> | <b>1,518</b> |
| <b>Juvenile</b>                | <b>18</b>   | <b>22</b>    | <b>43</b>    | <b>13</b>    | <b>33</b>    | <b>4</b>     |
| <b>Adult</b>                   | <b>976</b>  | <b>987</b>   | <b>1,241</b> | <b>1,391</b> | <b>1,367</b> | <b>1,514</b> |
| <b>Total Seizures</b>          | <b>239</b>  | <b>214</b>   | <b>282</b>   | <b>233</b>   | <b>301</b>   | <b>341</b>   |
| <b>Illegal Deer</b>            | <b>100</b>  | <b>116</b>   | <b>165</b>   | <b>114</b>   | <b>176</b>   | <b>183</b>   |
| <b>Illegal Bear</b>            | <b>2</b>    | <b>3</b>     | <b>1</b>     | <b>4</b>     | <b>7</b>     | <b>5</b>     |
| <b>Other</b>                   | <b>113</b>  | <b>82</b>    | <b>105</b>   | <b>105</b>   | <b>106</b>   | <b>144</b>   |
| <b>Car Killed Deer</b>         | <b>24</b>   | <b>13</b>    | <b>11</b>    | <b>10</b>    | <b>12</b>    | <b>9</b>     |

### **Most commonly encountered violations for which arrests were made 2009- 2012**

| <b>Rank</b> | <b>Violation</b>   | <b>2012</b> | <b>2011</b> | <b>2010</b> | <b>2009</b> |
|-------------|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>1</b>    | <b>Illegal use of bait –<br/>2012 - 204 firearm hunters/4 archery hunters</b>            | <b>208</b>  | <b>184</b>  | <b>216</b>  | <b>334</b>  |
| <b>2</b>    | <b>Place, possess or transport loaded gun in vehicle</b>                                 | <b>58</b>   | <b>33</b>   | <b>109</b>  | <b>88</b>   |
| <b>3</b>    | <b>Fail to validate tag</b>  | <b>49</b>   | <b>45</b>   | <b>50</b>   | <b>37</b>   |
| <b>4</b>    | <b>Hunt within 50 feet of paved road center</b>  | <b>42</b>   | <b>67</b>   | <b>53</b>   | <b>35</b>   |
| <b>5</b>    | <b>Hunt deer before or after hours –<br/>2012 - 31 firearm hunters/6 archery hunters</b> | <b>37</b>   | <b>25</b>   | <b>18</b>   | <b>24</b>   |
| <b>6</b>    | <b>Shoot within 50 feet of or across road</b>  | <b>31</b>   | <b>35</b>   | <b>28</b>   | <b>32</b>   |
| <b>7</b>    | <b>Hunt without or improper blaze orange</b>   | <b>26</b>   | <b>14</b>   | <b>26</b>   | <b>23</b>   |
| <b>8</b>    | <b>Shoot from vehicle</b>  | <b>25</b>   | <b>25</b>   | <b>16</b>   | <b>16</b>   |
| <b>8</b>    | <b>Hunt deer without a license</b>   | <b>25</b>   | <b>36</b>   | <b>30</b>   | <b>35</b>   |
| <b>9</b>    | <b>Use illegal elevated device, tree stand</b>   | <b>22</b>   | <b>45</b>   | <b>43</b>   | <b>51</b>   |
| <b>9</b>    | <b>Hunt with improper license</b>  | <b>22</b>   | <b>21</b>   | <b>20</b>   | <b>28</b>   |
| <b>10</b>   | <b>Feeding wild animals violations</b>   | <b>19</b>   | <b>28</b>   | <b>32</b>   | <b>42</b>   |

### **Summary of arrests:**

- There was a 1.5% decline in the total number of citations from 2011 to 2012 (down from 1,009 arrests to 994 arrests.)
- The top violation in 2012 was illegal baiting – the number of arrests for illegal baiting (208) represents a 11.5% increase from 2011.

- The number of citations issued for possession of a load firearm in a vehicle increased 43%, going from 33 in 2011 to 58 in 2012.

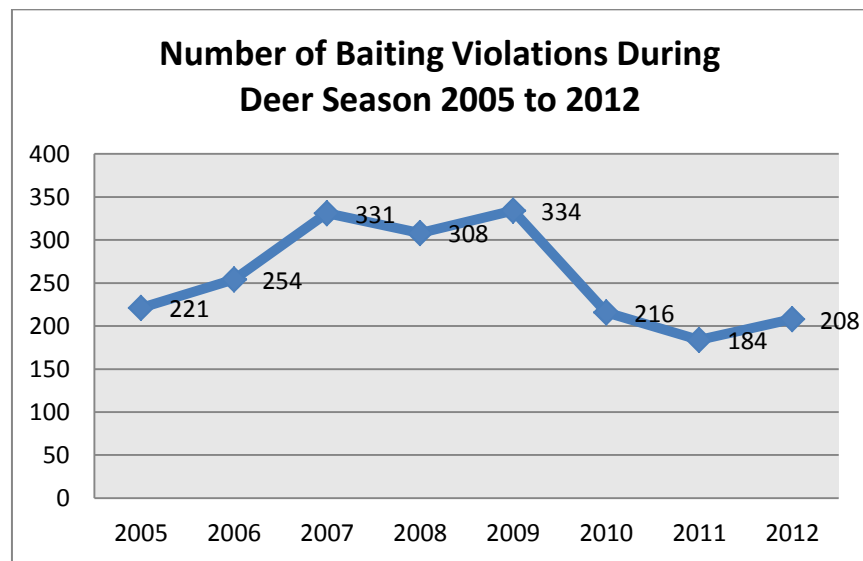
*Cases representative of deer season enforcement efforts around the state can be found starting in the addendum.*

### **Illegal Baiting and Feeding of Deer**

There was no significant increase in arrests for baiting except in the Northeast Region. Baiting does continue to be a source of conflict for adjacent property owners as the placement of bait to attract deer definitely creates an advantage for the illegal hunter.

#### **By region, arrests for illegal baiting and feeding during the gun deer season 2011 and 2012**

| <b>Region</b> | <b>2012<br/>Baiting citations</b> | <b>2011<br/>Baiting citations</b> | <b>2012<br/>Feeding citations</b> | <b>2011<br/>Feeding citations</b> |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Northern      | 59                                | 68                                | 0                                 | 8                                 |
| West Central  | 61                                | 50                                | 7                                 | 6                                 |
| Northeast     | 65                                | 41                                | 7                                 | 9                                 |
| South Central | 19                                | 16                                | 5                                 | 4                                 |
| Southeast     | 4                                 | 9                                 | 0                                 | 1                                 |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>208</b>                        | <b>184</b>                        | <b>19</b>                         | <b>28</b>                         |



## **WARNINGS**

Wardens tracked the number of verbal warnings for violations encountered during the gun deer season. A total of 1,627 warnings were given, which represents approximately 1.6 warnings for every citation issued.

### **Most commonly encountered violations for which warnings were given**

| <b>Rank</b> | <b>Violation</b>   | <b>Warnings</b> |
|-------------|--|-----------------|
| <b>1</b>    | <b>Hunt without, or improper, blaze orange</b>                           | <b>176</b>      |
| <b>2</b>    | <b>Illegal use of bait – firearms 159/archery 5</b>                      | <b>164</b>      |
| <b>3</b>    | <b>Hunt deer without back tag displayed</b>                              | <b>146</b>      |
| <b>4</b>    | <b>Hunt within 50 feet of paved road center</b>                          | <b>81</b>       |
| <b>5</b>    | <b>Fail to validate tag</b>  | <b>71</b>       |
| <b>6</b>    | <b>Operate ATV on roadway</b>  | <b>66</b>       |
| <b>7</b>    | <b>Fail to display or improper display of registration on ATV or UTV</b> | <b>52</b>       |
| <b>8</b>    | <b>Place/possess loaded gun in vehicle</b>                               | <b>51</b>       |
| <b>9</b>    | <b>Hunt deer before or after hours</b>                                   | <b>50</b>       |
| <b>10</b>   | <b>Fail to remove tree stand or blind on state land</b>                  | <b>48</b>       |

## **WOLVES SUSPECTED AS ILLEGALLY KILLED**

Seven wolves suspected as illegally killed were found dead during the 2012 gun deer season. This figure is preliminary pending investigation and animal necropsy to determine cause of death. Two of the wolf kills resulted in issuance of a citation for hunting wolf without a license. Illegal wolf kill in recent years was 9 in 2006, 2 in 2007, 3 in 2008, 8 in 2009, 2 in 2010, and 7 in 2011. It appears this year that 3 wolves were found illegally killed in Wolf Management Zone 1 that was closed to coyote hunting in 2011, but open in 2012. In 2011, the number of detected illegal kills was also 3; from this limited sample, there is no evidence of a major increase of illegal kills. Suspected illegal wolf shootings and current status in 2012 included the following. (*The AF or AM designation means an adult female or adult male greater than 2 years old.*)

1. AM not collared, found dead 11/25/12 in Walworth County - carcass held for necropsy: Citation
2. AF not collared, found dead 11/21/12 in Oconto County - carcass held for biological sampling
3. AF not collared, found dead 11/18/12 in Bayfield County - carcass held for biological sampling
4. AF with collar 802F, found dead 11/19/12 in Price County - carcasses held for necropsy
5. AM with collar 832M, found dead 11/19/12 in Adams County - carcass held for necropsy
6. AF with collar 615F, found dead 11/19/12 in Bayfield County - carcass held for necropsy
7. AM not collared, found dead 11/25/12 in Dane County - carcass held for biological sampling: Citation

## **CUSTOMER SERVICE: HOTLINES AND CALLS FOR SERVICE**

Use of the DNR Violation Hotline continues to be strong. The total number of calls handled by Hotline dispatchers increased during the gun deer season to 732. Hotline callers were also using the texting feature for the third year; nine texted reports were received via TIP 411.

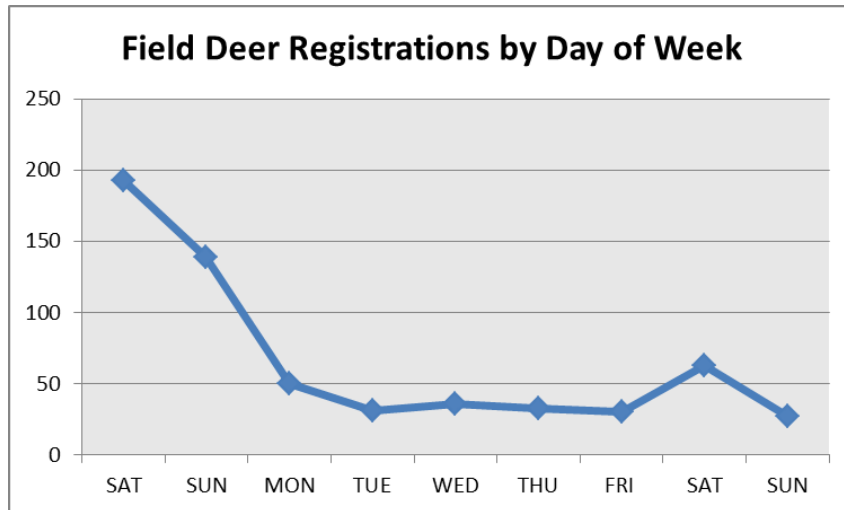
In addition to the documented Hotlines received by dispatchers, wardens received **3,637** calls for service. These calls include all complaints or requests *made directly to a warden* from the public, from another government agency or from news media requesting a service, action, information, follow-up, call back, contact, or response of any type during the deer season.

### **Calls to DNR Hotline during the gun deer season 2009-2012**

| <b>Type of information reported by caller</b>                                  | <b>2012</b> | <b>2011</b> | <b>2010</b> | <b>2009</b> |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Found dead deer or other carcass   | 108         | 84          | 90          | 84          |
| Baiting and feeding  | 29          | 23          | 24          | 48          |
| Heard shots; believes poaching   | 23          | 19          | 13          | 23          |
| Hunt within 50 feet of roadway center  | 12          | 29          | 30          | 20          |
| Shoot from a vehicle   | 18          | 21          | 16          | 21          |
| Hunt before or after hours   | 56          | 43          | 31          | 31          |
| Possession of untagged deer  | 11          | 1           | 2           | 5           |
| Possession of illegal deer   | 12          | 14          | 19          | 15          |
| Miscellaneous  | 256         | 234         | 245         | 229         |
| Total Hotlines   | 535         | 436         | 470         | 476         |
| Calls to the Hotline not DNR violations or other calls for service/information | 197         | 158         | 168         | 157         |
| Total calls  | 732         | 594         | 638         | 633         |

## **CUSTOMER SERVICE: FIELD REGISTRATION OF DEER**

In 2012, the warden service tracked the number of deer that wardens registered each day when contacting hunters in the field. Wardens have performed this customer service as time permitted for many years as a convenience to the hunter. A total of **613** deer were registered by wardens in the field during the 9-day season. The number of deer that wardens registered each day of the season tracks closely with hunting pressure on that day.



### **TAGGING SYSTEM**

Overall, the current configuration of the tagging system is generally working well.

Wardens, particularly those in northern Wisconsin where there were units with no antlerless harvest allowed, reported fielding many questions regarding the use of Herd Control tags that are issued with every license sold. Several wardens offered a possible solution to reducing this confusion. The suggestion was to prompt hunters at the time of sale whether or not they intended to hunt in a Herd Control Unit. If so, they would be issued a Herd Control tag. If not, they would not be issued a Herd Control tag. If the hunter later decided they wanted to hunt in a Herd Control unit, they could then obtain their first Herd Control tag at no charge.

# Deer Harvest Update

## **Overview**

In 2012, hunters in most of the state's deer management units experienced a traditional season structure. The number of buck-only units was reduced to 6 from 8 and the Oct. 4-day statewide antlerless hunt was eliminated. This was also the second year that hunters in the CWD-MZ were permitted to harvest a buck without the prior harvest of an antlerless deer and since we still permitted the harvest of additional bucks with the harvest on antlerless deer the process was coined "bonus buck".

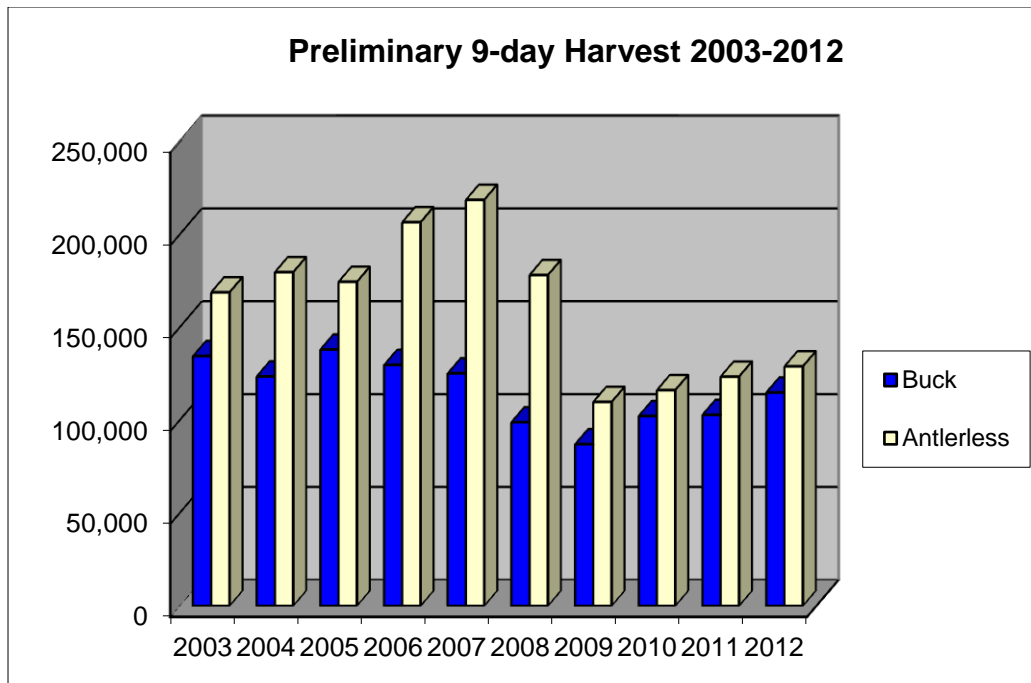
A preliminary tally of the 9-day firearm season showed hunters registered 243,739 deer, a 7.7% increase of 2011. Buck harvest was up at 114,822 – a 12% increase over 2011 and antlerless harvest was 128,917 – a 4% increase over 2011. As with prior years, the opening weekend proved to be the most popular time period to harvest a deer during the 9-day season, when 137,742 deer (61.3%) were harvested. Weather conditions were very mild throughout the state on opening weekend and allowed hunters to spend more time in the woods comfortably.

Early in 2013, after all the harvest data have been entered and verified, the department will complete updated over-winter population estimates. Preliminary harvest figures and discussions with many hunters suggest population growth has occurred in many areas where populations were below desired goals and others that are not performing as expected.

## **9-Day Firearm Season**

The 9-day firearm season harvest data comes from phone surveys of the 650+ deer registration stations conducted on the Tuesday following the season closure. County registration results represent the reported total from all stations located in a county. The reader should understand that the totals include deer harvested in other counties but were registered in the listed county.

The statewide preliminary harvest during the 2012 9-day season (November 17-25) is up 7.7 percent from 2011 (Table 1). The reported buck harvest increased by 12 percent and the antlerless harvest increased 4 percent. 2012 is the third year in a row of harvest increases and we will continue to take steps to work with hunters to manage the resource.



### **Deer Research**

In early 2011, the department began the largest research effort ever undertaken in Wisconsin, a five year project to answer key question on buck mortality and the impacts of predation. The research effort is being conducted in two study areas in northern and east central Wisconsin and is a partnership effort involving the department universities conservation organizations and many interested citizens who have volunteered countless hours to assist. A second year progress report is being prepared and will be available this winter. Some of the notable highlights include:

- Marked 768 deer in the first 2 years of the study
- 494 of them were collared
- 78 marked deer have been shot during the 2012 hunt season so far compared to 58 marked deer shot during 2011 hunting season
- Over 1,000 volunteers have assisted with deer capture efforts
- 175 landowners have graciously granted us access to their properties
- Leading sources of mortality in the North were predation by black bear, coyote, & bobcat
- Leading sources of mortality in the East were natural causes, coyote predation, then road kill
- Fawn survival from birth through 2 months was higher in 2012 compared to 2011
- Hunting was the leading cause of mortality for male & female deer across both areas

New field crews have been hired and are in training to begin trapping December 13th. Winter trapping will resume to increase the sample size of marked animal that will be monitored through the 2013 calendar year. Fawn capture and marking will take place in May and the call for volunteers has been announced.

## CWD Surveillance Update

This year we targeted our efforts to the established “core monitoring areas” in SW and SE Wisconsin and established surveillance in Washburn County since the positive animal was discovered in winter of 2012. The graphics below illustrate the coverage (numbers in the squares indicate sampled sections) of the samples we have obtained (966 samples – 633 negative, 7 inconclusive and 325 pending). Hunter cooperation has been outstanding and we anticipate obtaining the 1000 sample goal by the end of the year in the Washburn area.

- Over 5,300 samples statewide
- 48 Positives in CWD-MZ
- Washburn Area: 966 samples



## Venison Donation

For the 13th season of the Deer Donation program there were 62 counties and 129 processors participating in the statewide program. Since the end of the 9-day firearm season hunters have donated 2,425 deer which processors ground into approximate 109,125 pounds of venison. To date deer donation are down about 4% from last year (2527 in 2011).

The top five counties that donated the most deer are Buffalo (221), Jackson (91), Waupaca (87), Fond du Lac (85), and Oconto (81).